



## *Doll Revolution featuring Gene Swallow*



Lakota artist Gene Swallow creates unique dolls and textile arts that build on centuries of tradition. An enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, his work continues a long line of work with fibers and textiles among Lakota people. Dolls were once used as both toys and instructional tools. Mothers used the process of doll making to teach their daughters the skills needed in the matriarchal Lakota society. Gene continues these traditions by making functional toy dolls, but also forges a new path with his uniquely modern hybrid dolls that include both human and animal elements.

As a child, Gene frequently played with both dolls and action figures, immersing himself in a playful make-believe world. His current artwork builds on his childhood and his dolls are both whimsical and fantastical. Lakota artists Duane Wilcox and Jennifer White have both mentored and inspired Gene. The figures in Duane's ledger art are expressive and comical while being relatively simple in form, a style Gene tries to emulate in his own work. Jennifer's use of bold color in her portraiture led Gene to pursue a similar use of vivid fabrics and patterns in his dollmaking.

Nature provides inspiration for much of Gene's work, and he uses natural fibers and materials as much as possible. Although he gravitates toward earth tones in many of his dolls, he also uses colors selectively to enhance his dolls. Gene learned to sew by both hand and machine from his mother, who was an accomplished quilter and seamstress. When he makes his own dolls, he first begins with a vision of the shape and silhouette. Some of the dolls have a more traditional stout form, while others are elongated and slender. The fabric and materials he has available then dictate how the final form of the doll takes shape as Gene experiments with the properties of each unique fabric, many of which are historic fabrics he recycles from other sources.

Gene's work represents his own Lakota identity and sense of self. It is both ancient and modern, reflecting the balance that many Native Americans seek to achieve as they preserve their cultures in the modern age. Many of his dolls blend animal and human forms together, a reference to the connections between Lakotas and their four legged and winged relatives in the animal world. Gene uses elements such as horns and braided hair on his figures to give them a Lakota identity, without including more traditional elements such as beadwork decoration.

Gene's work has been included in exhibits at the Red Cloud Heritage Center, Pine Ridge, SD, and the Dahl Fine Arts Center, Rapid City, SD. He was also awarded Best of Division III: Three-Dimensional Award in the 2021 Native POP Art Show, Rapid City, SD, and received a First Peoples Fund Artist in Business Leadership Fellowship in 2021. This exhibit will mark his first solo exhibition.

Prices for the artwork can be obtained by contacting The Journey Museum store at (605) 394-2201. To purchase artwork after the exhibit closes, please contact Gene Swallow at [geneswallow@gmail.com](mailto:geneswallow@gmail.com)

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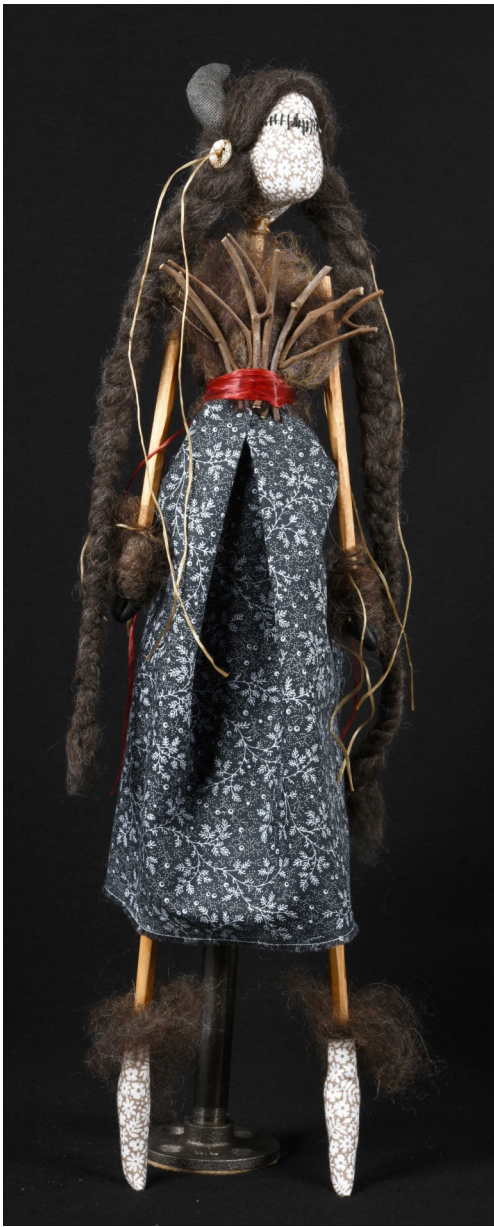
*Woohitike (Bravery)*

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June 16 to August 27, 2023





**Wowacintanka (Perseverance)**  
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**Wowicake (Truth)**  
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**Unsiiciyapi (Humility)**  
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